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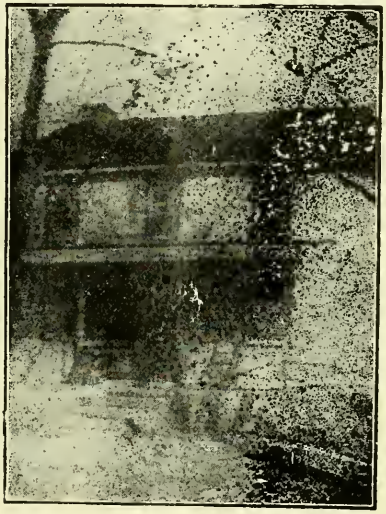
Traditional History

Written By

PUSEY W. BUFFINGTON

..IN 1900 OF..



DOE RUN

..AND..

ADJACENT LANDS AND DWELLING.

Price 20 Cents

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A TRADITIONAL HISTORY, WRITTEN BY PUSEY W. BUFFINGTON IN 1900, OF DOE RUN AND ADJACENT LANDS AND DWELLING.

This is a brief history, which I have gathered from time to time and which interested me while it may not interest many of you, or perhaps none at all, yet owing to its briefness I hope you will bear with me as it will take but little time to relate all I have to say.

Now in order to fully realize the position and appreciate the meaning, I must ask you to allow your imaginative power to wonderfully expand, relay the thinking brain of the day, let it open out to the fuliest extent of its relaxation. You must turn and look backward, imagine yourselves here two hundred years ago instead of 1900, say 1700, standing on this sacred ground, cushioned with autumn leaves and green tufts of grass, and for roof, clear blue sky above. Imagine yourselves here as far as the eyes can penetrate, one dense wooded forest, save only these meadows less densely wooded, producing plenty of tall rough pasture for what stock there is to devour it, with no sign of buildings or habitation, save only the lone one of which we treat.

Now if you have imaginatively placed yourselves in this position, as though dropped from some unknown port above, down into the midst of this towering forest, with no agricultural sign whatever, no ringing of the hammer on the anvil, no lowing of herds of cattle, no sound from the horses' hoofs, no rumbling from the vehicle wheels or automobiles as now when passing along our public highways, no sound save only those belonging to the forest, to the wild beasts and to the beautiful plumed birds as they warbled and sang praises to their maker. If your minds are now in this condition, then you are ready to receive, drink in and appreciate of what I relate. I would say, relinquish all ideas of present and future, take a retrospective view of this immediate place, right here where now the beautiful Doe Run creek meanders through this green valley, along the base of the prolific western hills, onward to and beyond the noted and renowned Brandywine, where stand the giant and monarchial oaks, with their outstretched arms, as so many sentinel guards to the surrounding country.

For the encouragement of those owning land here, I have this to say, that a person overheard two others recently talking in the Oxford Hotel, and in the course of conversation on the different qualities and productiveness of land, one remarked: If you would give me Doe Run Valley, you might have all the rest of the United States. Quite a send-off for those of you who own land in this valley. A short traditional history of a dwelling, and adjacent land be-

longing thereto, in Doe Run village, on the triangular piece of ground, on the north side of the Doe Run and Wilmington road, dating back to when this country was almost a perfect wilderness, when this immediate section was one vast forest, when these fertile lands now producing the enormous quantities of golden grain, and most prolific in the almost numberless varieties of choicest and most luscious fruits. When the small scattered patches of Indian maize, were like so many oases in the desert, when the Iroquois Indians' wigwam adorned the crest tops of our hills and as the smoke from the pipe of peace, and the cooking of their coon on their thanksgiving offer, which always occurred during the last moon of the month after their corn harvest, went curling heavenward through the forest tops, serving as an index board, serving as a pointer board, serving as a guide, so few were the settlements, that they embraced these means as a guide from one settlement to another. This was attested to as is related.

When a person (whose name I have forgotten) settled a short distance from where Clonmell Station now stands, and near the big Indian spring, and one sometime afterward settled near this place, and after residing here for some length of time, not aware that he had a neighbor anywhere near, noticed on different occasions smoke arising to the southward, above the tree tops, up toward the blue firmament above, concluded there must be a settlement of some kind in that direction and started off to ascertain its whereabouts. On reaching it he found it to be a person with whom he had had some acquaintance. On informing him where he had taken up his abode, he replied, "Oh, yes, I know that is in the great pasture-land of the valley. I drive my cattle there to pasture," so you see these ever-productive green meadows, wich are now so highly prized for their abundant pasturage, and upon which thousands of the finest cattle have been fed, were, in those ages, renowned for the same purpose, and known as the great pasture lands of the valley.

Now this is a history of the Smith Bros.' property in Doe Run village, formerly known as the Henry Wilson farm, and prior to that as a part of the property of John Barnard and son, and earlier that of John Hannum, and still earlier that of Nathaniel Ring, and still farther back as of one Archie McNeil, and in about 1700 or a little before as that of one Margaret Randell, who in later years was very familiarly known as Old Granny Ring, which brings us to the real subject of this history. This property together with that of the late Evan Baker, the late John Thompson, the late Barclay Smith, the late Joseph Palmer and the present George Elvin, Sr., making about eight hundred acres in all comprised her domain.

Just where the lines were we have no records. Land was not so valuable then. A great many of these small histories wind up or end with some romance or love story, but this one differs from those, as you will eventually see from the fact that love is, in the very beginning, the very commencement of this case. Granny Ring was the daughter of William Hamilton, a wealthy miller, owner of the Willour Mills, near Dublin, Ireland. He hired as a miller a young man by the name of William Ranken, who proved to be a first-class man, and in whom he had much confidence. The old gentleman, however, soon found that his daughter Margaret and Ranken were fast forming a very strong attachment for each other, and it being such a terrible disgrace and dishonor to the entire family, among the aristocracy there, for one to marry beneath their social quality, he discharged Ranken, who at once did as all oppressed and heavily burdened do; he came to America, verifying the old adage, "the course of true love never runs smooth."

It seems the young people, however, must have kept up a correspondence, for at the end of one year Margaret, under pretense of visiting friends and relatives in Dublin, her father being wealthy and doting on his only child, feeling that in getting rid of Ranken, he had not only averted a family calamity, but turned her thoughts into other channels, and on request dealt out funds to her liberally and even lavishingly. With these funds to make the pretended visit and some costly purchases while there and taking ample clothing, instead of remaining in Dublin, embarked on the next vessel for America, and arrived in Philadelphia and found Ranken. They were married.

This news so enraged her parents that they disinherited her. Now for sometime here we seem to have lost all trace of them, but eventually after her father's death, the mother relented and reinstated the daughter, she then received her full share of the great wealthy estate. It is supposed this was about the time she made this purchase, and built the west end of the present dwelling, having had all the lumber, all the sash and all the glass shipped from England. All the doors, window frames and panels were hand-carved in England. Some of the glass in the northwest window, in the second story, remains there intact to-day. This appears to be the oldest tavern of the place. The bar still stands, enclosed, with its little opening door, through which the drinks were dealt out. The little doorway above the bar is where they secreted their valuables during the Revolutionary War. It is said there was an iron ring in the floor of the room, and a gentleman of this place informs me that he did see it there a few years back. To this ring she kept a pet

monkey chained, whose name was July. The old fireplace and the great crane is still there, in which said monkey played a prank on them one Sabbath day. They had grain, corn, perhaps, as it was the chief product at that time, in the field beside the house, and the weather having been wet and unfavorable for sometime, concluded to gather it that day, and getting some other help went to work. The good-hearted granny thought she would give them a good dinner, made a famous pot of soup on the great crane in the old fireplace. Granny stepped out to call the men, she waited and came in with them. Lo and behold, the spectacle, as they came into the room, here sat the monkey upon a stool, with a cat by the tail dousing him in and out of the great pot of soup, so the poor cat suffered, and Granny had to get up some other dinner for them.

When this monkey died I have been unable to ascertain, but her remains were buried in a mahogany coffin on the east side of where now stands an evergreen in the front yard. A few years ago when Charles Plumbly lived on the property, in digging he came across the outline and bones of what he thought was a human skeleton, which must have been the monkey. During the time the armies were encamped near Chadd's Ford a party of five Hessians started out on a foraging expedition, and halted in front of this dwelling, dismounted and marched into the house, and with revolvers in hand forced the servants and occupants to go upstairs while they took possession of the first floor and selected whatever suited them, and on their return one of them was shot in West Chester.

During the erection of this building, one day the mechanics got to imbibing too freely, and while at dinner one of the servants got their bottle of rum, took a stone out of the wall of the east chimney, and built the bottle and contents in. I suppose it is there safe and sound to this day.

Ranken's eldest daughter, Margaret, married James Parry, and by the way, Dr. Gibbons Parry, of Florida, Henry County, Ohio, who visited the late James N. Taylor, of this vicinity, in 1879, came to this place and was given two or three relics out of the old house, which he carried home with him. He was the great, great grandson of Granny Ring. He said his grandfather, John Parry, son of James and Margaret, was born first month twelfth, 1746, and he had heard him say he lived with his grandmother Ring at the old Doe Run tavern until he was twelve years old.

After the decease of Ranken, the widow married Archie McNeil, of whom was born William McNeil, who inherited all his grandmother's estate, the eight hundred acres together with nearly all the silverware, of which there was a considerable amount. Dr.

Gibbons Parry, in writing to his friends here on the first month twelfth, 1880, said, I have in my possession two heirlooms, handed down from my grandfather Parry, to the eldest son, then to my father, James the eldest son, then to myself also the eldest son, now seventy-five years old the eighth of last twelfth month. These belonged to William and Margaret Ranken, a silver spoon marked M. R. on reverse side, P. S. enclosed in a heart, the other is a silver case marked W. R., containing silver-handled knife and fork, such as the gentry in ages past carried with them when invited out to dine. It seems the rich always took their own knife and fork with them, and it is thought it was from these silver cases, that our common table knife took the name of caseknife.

After the death of McNeil, the widow married Nathaniel Ring, an Irishman. This man proved to be quite an intemperate person, sometimes becoming quite unruly. It is said, on one of these occasions, when the brain was upturned and passion had taken possession, he was about to break up and demolish a highly prized table, she said to him, "I have laid to cool two husbands, and unless you behave, I will cool the third one;" what effect this threat had we have no account, but can surmise the result.

I was talking to an old gentleman, William Rubincan, who relates that in his boyhood days he used to visit his uncle, John Hannum, for two or three days at a time, and that this monkey July was then living. He kept three hounds, Ringwood, Haunis and Trips, by which he set much store.

Up to that date there was no water at these buildings, but carried it from a never-failing fountain, at what is now George Elvin's. Some difficulty having arisen between John and Clark, who then owned the Elvin property, John would not permit his family to get or use water from the Clark fountain. He told them to use the water from a surface swamp spring in the field below the house, but they would sometimes get it there unknown to him. On one occasion he saw the boy, William Rubincan, coming from Clark's with a pitcher of water in each hand. He said nothing to the boy, but went into the house and said, "Hannah, why did you send William up there for water? I said not to get any there." Hannah replied, "Where would we get any fit to use?" John said, "Down at the spring." Hannah replied, "Oh, pshaw on that spring, I wish you were tied in that spring with head down and heels up."

About the last we know of Granny Ring, was that her remains were laid to rest on the north of the hillside, sloping to the valley and creek, near the late Joseph Palmer's dwelling.

The End.

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